

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO ALL AMCONSULS CANADA

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 4877

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CA

SUBJECT: FINANCE MIN MACDONALD'S REMARK REPRESENTS FIRST BLINK
IN FEDGOV/PQ WAR OF NEVERS

REF: A. OTTAWA 4850, B. OTTAWA 4809

1. SUMMARY: FINANCE MIN MACDONALD'S COMMENT THAT
PROVINCIAL COMMON FRONT MAY AID SEPARATIST CAUSE
ATTRACTED STRONG OPPOSITION CRITICISM AND PM TURDEAU
IN EFFECT DISASSOCIATED HIMSELF FROM THE REMARK.
IN FEDGOV WAR OF NEVERS WITH PQ,INTEMPERATE MACDONALD
COMMENT CONTRASTS UNFAVORABLY WITH PQ'S REASONABLE
IMAGE TO DATE. END SUMMARY.

2. REPORTEDLY FOR FIRST TIME EVER, THE TEN PROVINCES
PRESENTED A COMMON FRONT AGAINST FEDGOV AT DEC 6-7
FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL FINANCE MINISTERS MEETING (REF A).
DURING CBC TELEVISION INTERVIEW AFTER INCONCLUSIVE
TERMINATION OF THE CONFERENCE, FINMIN MACDONALD ASSERTED
THAT THE COMMON FRONT COULD AID QUEBEC SEPARATIST
CAUSE. HE SAID "I SUSPECT THAT WHAT OTHER FINANCE
MINISTERS AND FIRST MINISTERS FROM OTHER PROVINCES WILL
HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IS IF, BY FORMING A UNITED FRONT

AGAINST OTTAWA OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, THEY ARE MAKING
THE SEPARATIST CAMPAIGN EASIER."

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3. MACDONALD STATEMENT CAME UNDER HEAVY OPPOSITION

CRITICISM AT COMMONS QUESTION PERIOD FOLLOWING DAY AND THE CONTROVERSY RECEIVED PROMINENT MEDIA ATTENTION. NW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) LEADER BROADBENT CHARACTERIZED IT AS "ABSURD AND IRRESPONSIBLE." PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) LEADER JOE CLARK ASKED PM TRUDEAU WHETHER MACDONALD WAS IMPLYING THAT "TO AGREE WITH QUEBEC AND/OR TO OPPOSE A POSITION TAKEN BY THE PRESENT NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ON ISSUES OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO ALL PROVINCES IS TO AID SEPARATISM AND THUS TO BE AGAINST CANADA." TRUDEAU, WITHOUT ATTEMPTING DIRECT DEFENSE OF MACDONALD'S REMARKS, REPLIED ONLY THAT OPPOSITION HAD DRAWN AN "IRRESPONSIBLE CONCLUSION."

4. COMMENT: MACDONALD COMMENT UNFORTUNATE TO FEDGOV IN SEVERAL RESPECTS AND FACT THAT IS WAS A GAFFE BEST DEMONSTRATED BY TRUDEAU'S DE FACTO DISASSOCIATION FROM IT. FIRST, AS INDICATED IN REF B, FEDGOV AND PQ NOW IN APPARENT WAR OF NEVERS WITH EACH SIDE TRYING TO PROJECT IMAGE OF CALM RESOLVE AND RELUCTANT TO MAKE FIRST SUBSTANTIVE MOVE. CONTRASTED TO REASONABLE, EVEN JOVIAL IMAGE PROJECTED DURING THE FINANCE MINISTERS CONFERENCE BY QUEBEC FINMIN PARIZEAU AND INTERGOV AFFAIRS MIN CLAUDE MORIN, MACDONALD WITH HIS INTEMPERATE COMMENT COMES AWAY DISTINCTLY SECOND BEST. SECOND, BY QUESTIONING JUDGMENT OF PROVINCES OTHER THAN QUEBEC, MACDONALD MAY HAVE REDUCED GOOD WILL TOWARDS THE FEDGOV FROM THAT QUARTER. AND THE FEDGOV WILL NEED ALL THE GOOD WILL IT CAN GET FROM THE ANGLO PROVINCES. FINALLY, MACDONALD HAS NOT ADVANCED HIS OWN POSITION IN SELLING THE FEDERALIST CAUSE. HE IS ONE OF THE MOST CAPABLE CABINET MEMBERS AND ONE OF THE VERY FEW ANGLO MINISTERS WHO SPEAKS FRENCH. HE HAS ALREADY BEEN USED IN CAMPAIGN TO ARTICULATE THE FEDERAL POSITION IN QUEBEC AND THIS INCIDENT COULD LIMIT HIS FUTURE USEFULNESS IN THIS ROLE.
ENDERS

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